

VERMONT TELEGRAPH.

TWO DOLLARS PER ANNUM.]

BY ORSON S. MURRAY.

"I AM SET FOR THE DEFENCE OF THE GOSPEL."

BRANDON, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 16, 1839.

[PAYABLE WITHIN FOUR MONTHS.]

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Religious Miscellany.

AN ANGEL STANDING BY.—We read of a certain youth in the early days of Christianity, (those periods of heroic suffering and heroic patience and legendary wonder to which I have already ventured to call your attention)—we read of a Christian on whom his persecutors had put in practice a more than common share of their cruel ingenuity, that by his torments (let those who will, or can, go through the horrible details) they might compel him to deny his Lord and Savior. After a long endurance of those pains they released him in wonder at his obstinacy. His Christian brethren are said to have wondered too, and to have asked him by what mighty faith he could so strangely subdue the violence of the fire, as that neither a cry nor a groan escape him. "It was indeed most painful," was the noble youth's reply; "but an angel stood by me when my anguish was at the worst, with his finger pointed to Heaven." Oh thou, whoever thou art, that art tempted to commit a sin, do thou think on death, and that thought will be an angel unto thee! The hope of heaven will raise thy courage above the fiercest threatenings of the world; the fear of hell will rob thy persuasions of their enchantments; and the very extremity of thy trial may itself contribute to animate thy exertions by the thought that the greater thy endurance now, the greater will be thy reward hereafter.—*Bishop Heber.*

THE FIRST JOY OF THE CHRISTIAN.—Grievous, indeed, is their misunderstanding of the Gospel, who think that peace must be postponed till we know that holiness is in progress within us, and that repentance is going onwards even unto perfection. It is true, that without holiness no man can see God; and it is as true, that unless we repent we shall perish. But just as the man who had the offer of reconciliation laid by an offended neighbor at his door, ought not to postpone his joy till the hour of certain easy and practicable formalities; so neither ought we to postpone it till the time when we know that repentance and holiness have been realized upon our characters. And that, not because these graces are easily attainable by us, but because these graces are actually included as so many offers in the communication of the Gospel; because God holds them out for our acceptance, just as effectually as he holds out pardon for our acceptance; because he in whom all sufficiency dwells, promises to make his grace sufficient for every one of our necessities; because he, who has given us his own Son, pledges himself to all who receive the gift, that he will also with him freely give them all things. The man who only hears the offer of pardon upon repentance as a contingency which depends upon himself, may well hear such an announcement without being gladdened and tranquilized by it. But let a man hear the offer in the whole comprehensiveness of its terms; let him perceive that repentance, as well as the remission of sins, is included in it; let him understand, that God holds out to him in the Gospel a sanctifying Spirit as well as an atoning Sacrifice, and then let holiness be represented to be as indispensable to heaven as it may, no sense of impotency whatever will intercept the peace which ought to flow in upon his heart from such a communication. From the moment that he closes with these overtures, he may have peace; and the point at which he recognizes in the gospel the view of him who, when he commanded, made the winds and the waters to obey, marks the point at which the dark and fearful agitations of a sinner's bosom should cease into a calm.—*Chalmers.*

VERMONT TELEGRAPH.

BRANDON, SATURDAY, OCT. 12, 1839.

For the Telegraph.

Revival in Hardwick Baptist Church.—Brother Murray:—As it is always cheering to the friends of Christ to hear of the progress of His cause, I send you a short account of a late revival in Hardwick.

At the last session of the Association, in June last, the brethren who attended that church were awakened to renewed energy and zeal in laboring for the interests of Zion. In the month of July, two were added to the church by baptism. The impatient began to feel serious in view of their lost condition; and the voice of God seemed to be, "arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord hath risen upon thee."

On the 28th of August, a quarterly meeting was held with the church, which was protracted for nearly three weeks. At the very commencement, some were inquiring what they should do to be saved. God was present with his people, and attended the word preached to the hearts and consciences of those who heard; and it brought forth fruit unto life. The converting power of God was manifest, and almost every day of the meeting there were some new witnesses for Him. Although the place is thinly populated, and

the season of the year was such that a great portion of the inhabitants were confined to labor at home, yet God met them in their fields, and brought them to the evening meetings. They came miles with torch in hand; and were made the happy recipients of Divine grace.

The converts as soon as they received an evidence of pardoned sin, stood forth as fearless and bold soldiers of the cross of Christ, testifying to all that God had power on earth to forgive sins. So engaged were the young disciples, that even while the meeting was in progress they went into different neighborhoods and set up meetings—called forward the anxious and engaged in prayer for the salvation of their souls. Through this means the revival was extended, and converts were multiplied. At the close of the meeting, I had the happiness of waiting upon seven in the ordinance of baptism. Last Sabbath I labored with that people, baptized twelve, and gave the right hand of fellowship to twenty, who for the first time came forward with the church to commemorate the dying love of Christ in the sacrament of the Lord's supper.

How many have passed from death unto life will be known at that day when God shall make up his Jewels. I think I was never engaged in a revival where the converts seemed to get so clear an evidence of adoption and give that evidence to others—where God was so manifestly present, and there was so little opposition—where the car of salvation moved with so little effort, and so little obstruction. In view of what God has done for this feeble church, we are led to exclaim, "what hath God wrought." The church are now destitute of a pastor. May the great Head of the church direct some one of his servants that way to break unto them the bread of life. Yours, truly,

M. D. MILLER.

Danville, Oct. 6, 1839.

P. S. Brother J. Baldwin, (who by the way took a prominent part in the labors at Hardwick, has just closed a protracted meeting at Walden, which was attended with considerable success. Brother Grant is laboring with brother Burrows at Passumpsic. The work of the Lord is there going on. We expect brother Grant to assist us in Danville, in a protracted meeting, as soon as he closes his labors at Passumpsic. I give this notice, as persons often wish to correspond with brother Grant, but know not where to direct.

M. D. M.

Under the head below, I design to give, in several successive future papers, a number of articles from the pen of Thomas Chalmers, of Glasgow. These discourses are taken into the Edinburgh Encyclopedia, and form the substance of the article under the head, Christianity, in that work. It needs attention and care in reading them. And they will bear reading more than once. The articles will not all be as long as the first.

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

Chapter I.

On the Principles of Historical Evidence, and their Application to the Question of the Truth of Christianity.

Were a verbal communication to come to us from a person at a distance, there are two ways in which we might try to satisfy ourselves, that this was a true communication, and that there was no imposition in the affair. We might either sit in examination upon the substance of the message; and then from what we knew of the person from whom it was professed to come, judge whether it was probable that such a message would be sent by him; or we might sit in examination upon the credibility of the messengers.

It is evident, that in carrying on the first examination, we might be subject to very great uncertainty. The professed author of the communication in question may live at such a distance from us, that we may never have it in our power to verify his message by any personal conversation with him. We may be so far ignorant of his character and designs, as to be unequalled to judge of the kind of communication that should proceed from him. To estimate aright the probable authenticity of the message from what we know of its author, would require an acquaintance with his plans, and views, and circumstances, of which we may not be in possession. We may bring the greatest degree of sagacity to this investigation; but then the highest sagacity is of no avail, when there is an insufficiency of data. Our ingenuity may be unbounded; but then we may want the materials. The principle which we assume may be untrue in itself, and therefore may be fallacious in its application.

Thus, we may derive very little light from our first argument. But there is still a second in reserve,—the credibility of the messengers. We may be no judges of the kind of communication which is natural, or likely to proceed from a person with whom we are but imperfectly acquainted; but we may be very competent

judges of the degree of faith that is to be reposed in the bearers of that communication. We may know and appreciate the natural signs of veracity. There is a tone, and a manner characteristic of honesty, which may be both intelligible and convincing. There may be a concurrence of several messengers. There may be their substantial agreement. There may be the total want of any thing like concert or collusion among them. There may be their determined and unanimous perseverance, in spite of all the incredulity and all the opposition which they meet with. The subject of the communication may be most unpalatable to us; and we may be so unreasonable, as to wreak our unpleasant feeling upon the bearers of it. In this way, they may not only have no earthly interest to deceive us, but have the strongest inducement possible to abstain from insisting upon that message which they were charged to deliver. Last of all, as the conclusive seal of their authenticity, they may all agree in giving us a watchword, which we previously knew could be given by none but their master; and which none but his messengers could ever obtain the possession of. In this way, unfruitful as all our efforts may have been upon the first subject of examination, we may derive from the second the most decisive evidence, that the message in question is a real message, and was actually transmitted to us by its professed author.

Now, this consideration applies in all its parts to a message from God. The argument for the truth of this message resolves itself into the same two topics of examination. We may sit in judgment upon the subject of the message; or we may sit in judgment upon the credibility of its bearers.

The first forms a great part of that argument for the truth of the Christian religion, which comes under the head of its *internal evidences*. The substance of the message is neither more nor less, than that particular scheme of the divine economy which is revealed to us in the New Testament; and the point of inquiry is, whether this scheme be consistent with that knowledge of God and his attributes which we previously are in possession of?

It appears to many, that no effectual argument can be founded upon this consideration, because they do not count themselves enough acquainted with the designs or character of the being from whom the message professes to have come. Were the author of the message some distant and unknown individual of our own species, we would scarcely be entitled to found an argument upon any comparison of ours, with the import of the message and the character of the individual, even though we had our general experience of human nature to help us in the speculation. Now, of the invisible God, we have no experience whatever. We are still further removed from all direct and personal observation of him or of his counsels. Whether we think of the eternity of his government, or the mighty range of his influence over the wide departments of nature and providence, he stands at such a distance from us, as to make the management of his empire a subject inaccessible to all our faculties.

It is evident, however, that this does not apply to the second topic of examination. The bearers of the message were beings like ourselves; and we can apply our safe and certain experience of man to their conduct and testimony. We may know too little of God, to found any argument upon the coincidence which we conceive to exist between the subject of the message and our previous conceptions of its author. But we may know enough of man to pronounce upon the credibility of the messengers. Had they the manner and physiognomy of honest men? Was their testimony resisted, and did they persevere in it? Had they any interest in fabricating the message; or did they suffer in consequence of its perseverance? Did they suffer to such a degree, as to constitute a satisfying pledge of their integrity? Was there more than one messenger, and did they agree as to the substance of that communication which they made to the world? Did they exhibit any special mark of their office as the messengers of God; such a mark as none but God could give, and none but his approved messengers could obtain the possession of? Was this mark the power of working miracles; and were these miracles so obviously addressed to the senses, as to leave no suspicion of deceit behind them? These are questions which we feel our competency to take up, and to decide upon. They lie within the legitimate boundaries of human observation; and upon the solution of these do we rest the question of the truth of the Christian religion.

This, then, is the state of the question with those to whom the message was originally addressed. They had personal access to the messengers; and the evidences of their veracity lay before them. They were the eye and ear-witnesses of those facts which occurred at the commencement of the Christian religion, and upon which its credibility rests. What met their observation must have been enough to satisfy them; but we live at the distance of nearly 2000 years, and is there enough to satisfy us? Those facts, which constitute the evidence for Christianity, might have been credible and convincing to them, if they really saw them; but is there any way by which

they can be rendered credible and convincing to us, who only read of them? What is the expedient by which the knowledge and belief of the men of other times can be transmitted to posterity? Can we distinguish between a corrupt and a faithful transmission? Have we evidence before us, by which we can ascertain what was the belief of those to whom the message was first communicated? And can the belief which existed in their minds be derived to ours, by our sitting in judgment upon the reasons which produced it?

The surest way in which the belief and knowledge of the men of former ages can be transmitted to their descendants, is through the medium of written testimony; and it is fortunate for us, that the records of the Christian religion are not the only historical documents which have come down to us. A great variety of information has come down to us in this way; and a great part of that information is as firmly believed, and as confidently proceeded upon, as if the thing narrated had happened within the limits of our eye-sight. No man doubts the invasion of Britain by Julius Cæsar; and no man doubts, therefore, that a conviction of the truth of past events may be fairly produced in the mind by the instrumentality of a written memorial. This is the kind of evidence, which is chiefly appealed to for the truth of ancient history; and it is counted satisfying evidence for all that part of it, which is received and depended upon.

In laying before the reader, then, the evidence for the truth of Christianity, we do not call his mind to any singular or unprecedented exercises of its faculties. We call him to pronounce upon the credibility of written documents, which profess to have been published at a certain age, and by certain authors. The inquiry involves in it no principle which is not appealed to every day in questions of ordinary criticism. To sit in judgment on the credibility of a written document, is a frequent and familiar exercise of the understanding with literary men. It is fortunate for the human mind, when so interesting a question as its religious faith can be placed under the tribunal of such evidence as it is competent to pronounce upon. It was fortunate for those to whom Christianity (a professed communication from heaven) was first addressed, that they could decide upon the genuineness of the communication by such familiar and every-day principles, as the marks of truth or falsehood in the human bearers of that communication. And it is fortunate for us that when, after that communication has assumed the form of a historical document, we can pronounce upon the degree of credit which should be attached to it, by the very same exercise of mind which we so confidently engage in, when sitting in examination upon the other historical documents that have come down to us from antiquity.

If two historical documents possess equal degrees of evidence, they should produce equal degrees of conviction. But if the object of the one be to establish some fact connected with our religious faith, while the object of the other is to establish some fact, about which we feel no other interest than that general curiosity which is gratified by the solution of any question in literature, this difference in the object produces a difference of effect in the feelings and tendencies of the mind. It is impossible for the mind, while it inquires into the evidence of a Christian document, to abstain from all reference to the important conclusion of the inquiry. And this will necessarily mingle its influence with the arguments which engage its attention. It may be of importance to attend to the feelings which are thus given to the investigation, and in how far they have affected the impression of the Christian argument.

We know it to be the opinion of some, that in this way an undue advantage has been given to that argument. Instead of a pure question of truth, it has been made a question of sentiment; and the wishes of the heart have mingled with the exercises of the understanding. There is a class of men who may feel disposed to overrate its evidences, because they are anxious to give every support and stability to a system, which they conceive to be most intimately connected with the dearest hopes and wishes of humanity; because their imagination is carried away by the sublimity of its doctrines, or their heart engaged by that amiable morality which is so much calculated to improve and adorn the face of society.

Now we are ready to admit, that as the object of the inquiry is not the character, but the truth of Christianity, the philosopher should be careful to protect his mind from the delusion of its charms. He should separate the exercises of the understanding from the tendencies of the fancy or of the heart. He should be prepared to follow the light of evidence, though it may lead him to conclusions the most painful and melancholy. He should train his mind to all the hardihood of abstract and unfeeling intelligence. He should give up every thing to the supremacy of argument, and be able to renounce, without a sigh, all the tenderest possessions of infancy, the moment that truth demands of him the sacrifice. Let it be remembered, however, that while one species of prejudice operates in favor of Christianity, another prejudice operates against it. There is a class of men who are repelled from the investigation of its evidences, because in their minds Christianity is allied with

the weakness of superstition; and they feel that they are descending when they bring down their attention to a subject which engrosses so much respect and admiration from the vulgar.

It appears to us, that the peculiar feeling which the sacredness of the subject gives to the inquirer, is, upon the whole, unfavorable to the impression of the Christian argument. Had the subject not been sacred, and had the same testimony been given to the facts that are connected with it, we are satisfied that the history of Jesus in the New Testament would have been looked upon as the best supported by evidence of any history that has come down to us. It would assist us in appreciating the evidence for the truth of the gospel history, if we could conceive for a moment, that Jesus, instead of being the founder of a new religion, had been merely the founder of a new school of philosophy, and that the different histories which have come down to us had merely represented him as an extraordinary person, who had rendered himself illustrious among his countrymen by the wisdom of his sayings, and the beneficence of his actions. We venture to say, that had this been the case, a tenth part of the testimony which has actually been given, would have been enough to satisfy us. Had it been a question of mere erudition, where neither a predilection in favor of a religion, nor an antipathy against it, could have impressed a bias in any one direction, the testimony, both in weight and in quantity, would have been looked upon as quite unexampled in the whole compass of ancient literature.

To form a fair estimate of the strength and decisiveness of the Christian argument, we should, if possible, divest ourselves of all reference to religion, and view the truth of the gospel history, purely as a question of erudition. If at the outset of the investigation we have a prejudice against the Christian religion, the effect is obvious; and without any refinement of explanation, we see at once how such a prejudice must dispose us to annex suspicion and distrust to the testimony of the Christian writers. But even when the prejudice is on the side of Christianity, the effect is unfavorable on a mind that is at all scrupulous about the rectitude of its opinions. In these circumstances, the mind gets suspicious of itself. It feels a predilection, and becomes apprehensive lest this predilection may have disposed it to cherish a particular conclusion, independently of the evidences by which it is supported. Were it a mere speculative question, in which the interests of man, and the attachments of his heart had no share, he would feel greater confidence in the result of his investigation. But it is difficult to separate the moral impressions of piety, and it is no less difficult to calculate their precise influence on the exercises of the understanding. In the complex sentiment of attachment and conviction, which he annexes to the Christian religion, he finds it difficult to say, how much is due to the tendencies of the heart, and how much is due to the pure and unmingled influence of argument. His very anxiety for the truth, disposes him to overrate the circumstances which give a bias to his understanding, and through the whole process of the inquiry, he feels a suspicion and an embarrassment, which he would not have felt, had it been a question of ordinary erudition.

The same suspicion which he attaches to himself, he will be ready to attach to all whom he conceives to be in similar circumstances. Now, every author who writes in defence of Christianity, is supposed to be a Christian; and this, in spite of every argument to the contrary, has the actual effect of weakening the impression of his testimony. This suspicion effects, in a more remarkable degree, the testimony of the first writers on the side of Christianity. In opposition to it, you have no doubt, to allege the circumstances under which the testimony was given;—the tone of sincerity which runs through the performance of the author; the concurrence of other testimonies; the persecutions which were sustained in adhering to them, and which can be accounted for on no other principle, than the power of conscience and conviction; and the utter impossibility of imposing a false testimony on the world, had they even been disposed to do it. Still there is a lurking suspicion, which often survives the strength of all argument, and which it is difficult to get rid of, even after it has been demonstrated to be completely unreasonable. He is a Christian. He is one of the party. Am I an infidel? I persist in distrusting the testimony. Am I a Christian? I rejoice in the strength of it; but this very joy becomes matter of suspicion to a scrupulous inquirer. He feels something more than the concurrence of his belief in the testimony of the writer. He catches the infection of his piety and his moral sentiments. In addition to the acquiescence of the understanding, there is a *con amore* feeling both in himself, and in his author, which he had rather deny without, because he finds it difficult to compute the precise amount of its influence; and the consideration of this restrains him from that clear and decided conclusion, which he would infallibly have landed in, had it been purely a secular investigation.

There is something in the very sacredness of the subject, which intimidates the understanding, and restrains it from making the same firm and confident applica-

tion of its faculties, which it would have felt itself perfectly warranted to do, had it been a question of ordinary history. Had the apostles been the disciples of some eminent philosopher, and the fathers of the church, their immediate successors in the office of presiding over the discipline and instruction of the numerous schools which they had established, this would have given a secular complexion to the argument, which we think would have been more satisfying to the mind, and have impressed upon it a closer and more familiar conviction of the history in question. We should have immediately brought it into comparison with the history of other philosophers, and could not have failed to recognize, that, in minuteness of information, in weight and quantity of evidence, in the concurrence of numerous and independent testimonies, and in the total absence of every circumstance that should dispose us to annex suspicion to the account which lay before us, it far surpassed anything that had come down to us from antiquity. It so happens, however, that, instead of being the history of a philosopher, it is the history of a prophet. The veneration we annex to the sacredness of such a character, mingles with our belief in the truth of his history. From a question of simple truth, it becomes a question in which the heart is interested; and the subject from that moment assumes a certain holiness and mystery, which veil the strength of the argument, and takes off from that familiar and intimate conviction which we annex to the far less authenticated histories of profane authors.

It may be further observed, that every part of the Christian argument has been made to undergo a most severe scrutiny. The same degree of evidence which in questions of ordinary history commands the easy and universal acquiescence of every inquirer, has, in the subject before us, been taken most thoroughly to pieces, and pursued, both by friends and enemies, into all its ramifications. The effect of this is unquestionable. The genuineness and authenticity of the profane historian, are admitted upon much inferior evidence to what we can adduce for the different pieces which make up the New Testament. And why? Because the evidence has been hitherto thought sufficient, and the genuineness and authenticity have never been questioned. Not so with gospel history. Though its evidence is precisely the same in kind, and vastly superior in degree to the evidence for the history of the profane writer, its evidence has been questioned, and the very circumstance of its being questioned has annexed a suspicion to it. At all points of the question, there has been a struggle and a controversy. Every ignorant objection, and every rash and petulant observation, has been taken up and commented upon by the defenders of Christianity. There has at last been so much said about it, that a general feeling of insecurity is apt to accompany the whole investigation. There has been so much fighting, that Christianity now is looked upon as debatable ground. Other books, where the evidence is much inferior, but which have had the advantage of never being questioned, are received as of established authority. It is striking to observe the perfect confidence with which an infidel will quote a passage from an ancient historian. He perhaps does not overrate the credit due to him. But present him with a tabulated and comparative view of all the evidences that can be adduced for the gospel of Matthew, and any profane historian, which he chooses to fix upon, and let each distinct evidence be discussed upon no other principle than the ordinary and approved principles of criticism, we assure him that the sacred history would far outweigh the profane in the number and value of its testimonies.

In illustration of the above remarks, we can refer to the experience of those who have attended to this examination. We ask them to recollect the satisfaction which they felt, when they came to those parts of the examination, where the argument assumes a secular complexion. Let us take the testimony of Tacitus for an example. He asserts the execution of our Savior in the reign of Tiberius, and under the procuratorship of Pilate; the temporary check, which this gave to his religion; its revival, and the progress it had made, not only over Judea, but to the city of Rome. Now all this is attested in the Annals of Tacitus. But it is also attested in a far more direct and circumstantial manner in the annals of another author, in a book entitled *the History of the Acts of the Apostles by the Evangelist Luke*. Both of these performances carry on the very face of them the appearance of unsuspicious and well-authenticated documents. But there are several circumstances, in which the testimony of Luke possesses a decided advantage over the testimony of Tacitus. He was the companion of these very apostles. He was an eye witness to many of the events recorded by him. He had the advantage over the Roman historian in time and in place, and in personal knowledge of many of the circumstances in his history. The genuineness of his publication, too, and the time of its appearance, are far better established, and by precisely that kind of argument which is held decisive in every other question of erudition. Besides all this, we have the testimony of at least five of the Christian fathers, all of whom had the same, or a greater, advantage in point of time than Tacitus, and who had a much nearer and readier access to origin-